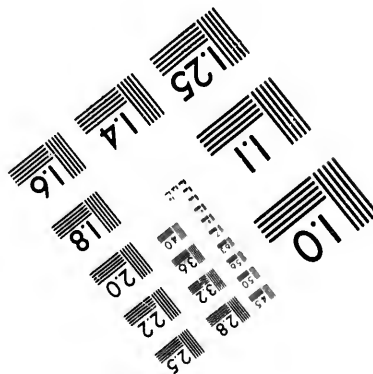
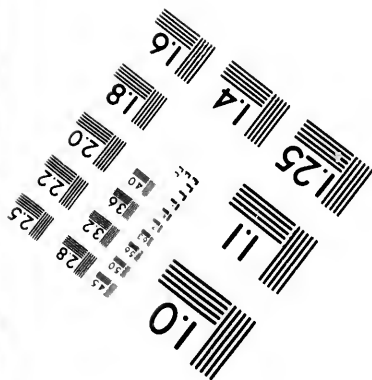
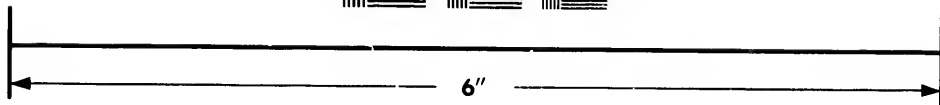
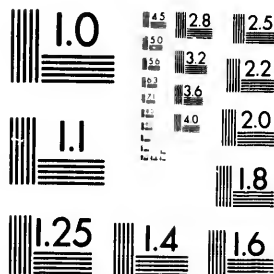


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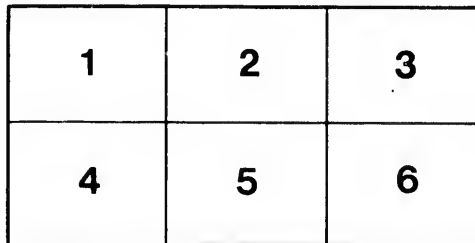
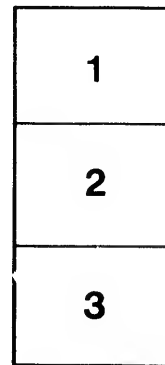
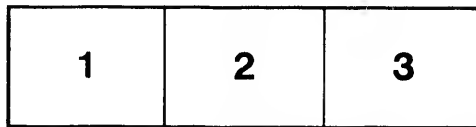
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THE DATE OF CABOT'S DISCOVERY  
OF THE  
AMERICAN CONTINENT,  
AND  
AN ALLEGED FORGERY OF  
CHATTERTON.

A REJOINDER  
BY  
MR. HENRY HARRISSE.

*Reprinted from Notes and Queries,*  
August 14, 1897.

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LONDON:  
B. F. STEVENS.  
1897.

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## JOHN CABOT AND THE MATTHEW.

(8<sup>th</sup> S. xi. 501 ; xii. 49.)

The object of my communication at the first reference was simply to call the attention of critical historians to certain allegations regarding the discovery of the continent of North America. I stated that the Fust MS. was akin to Barrett's :

*Barrett's MS.*

"In the year 1497, the 24th of June, on St. John's Day, was Newfoundland found by Bristol men, in a ship called the Matthew."

*The Fust MS.*

"This year, on St. John the Baptist's Day, the land of America was found by the Merchants of Bristowe in a shippe of Bristowe called the Mathew."

I added that the extract from the Fust MS. published by MR. WEARE had already been printed, more than twenty years ago, in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica' :—

'*Encyclop. Britan.*,' iv. 350.

"This year (1497), on St. John the Baptist's Day, the land of America was found by the merchants of Bristowe in a ship of Bristol called the Matthew, the which said ship departed from the port of Bristowe the 2d of May, and came home again 6th August following."

*Mr. Weare's Book*, p. 116.

"This year, on St. John the Baptist's Day, the land of America was found by the Merchants of Bristow in a shippe of Bristowe, called the Mathew; the which said ship departed from the port of Bristowe the second day of May, and came home again the 6th of August next following."



The fact that in one of these extracts "Matthew" is spelled with one *t* only, whilst in the other it is spelled with two, can hardly authorize MR. WEARE to say that he published this complete text "for the first time." The statements concerning the mayors and sheriffs are separate entries, bearing no other relation to the excerptum than the date of the year, which is also given by the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.'

To my mind, the entry about Cabot's voyage is so framed and worded as to convey the belief that it was originally penned in 1497. If so, the account is a forgery in one respect at least, owing to its containing the word "America." This designation could be read at an early date in books, maps, and globes, but not until April, 1507, when Waltzenmüller invented it. As to the particulars of the invention of the name "America," Humboldt was the first to disclose them, and that only fifty years ago; so that any one writing in the eighteenth century, for instance, may well have believed that the New World was already called "America" so far back as 1497.

But it is now shown that the Fust MS. purports to have been completed "the present yeere, 1565." In admitting that such is really the case, it was written at best sixty-eight years after Cabot's voyage. This detracts singularly from its alleged importance, particularly when we notice that not only do the dubious items it sets forth stand uncorroborated, but that they remained entirely unknown to Fabian and even to such indefatigable searchers of chronicles as John Stow and Hakluyt.

The statement that Cabot's Transatlantic discovery was accomplished "on St. John the Baptist's Day (June 24), 1497," appeared for the

first time in the third edition of Sebastian Cabot's map, edited by Clement Adams in 1549 (the other editions print "1494"). Maurice Toby, Gent.—it he ever existed—may have borrowed the datum from that map, but it is much more likely that it was taken from a book which since the close of the sixteenth century has circulated extensively in England, viz., Hakluyt's 'Principall Navigations.' One of the reasons for the probability is that Hakluyt's work also affords, in nearly the same terms, elements for the second statement in the Fust MS., viz., "the which said ship departed from the port of Bristowe the second day of May." In Hakluyt it reads as follows: "which said shippe...departed from Bristowe in the beginning of May." Now Hakluyt's work was not published until 1589, and as the Fust MS. purports to have been written in 1565, we should have here another anachronism.

To change "the beginning of May" into "the second day of May" is not a very difficult matter; but, as my opponents rightly observe, the Fust MS. contains a third date, which cannot be so easily explained away, viz., the alleged day of Cabot's return to Bristol, "August 6th." This may be a random figure, although it agrees in a measure with Cabot's presence in London on the 10th, when Henry VII. made a present of 10*l.* "to hym that founde the Isle." Besides, we know from Pasqualigo that the successful navigator was three months on the voyage: "Stato mexi tre sul viazo," which synchronizes practically with the space of time between "the beginning of May" and "the 6th of August." What lends force to the objection is the fact that, so far as known at present, the gratuity of 10*l.* and the time spent on

the voyage have been disclosed in print only within the last sixty years. The mysterious "Maurice Toby, Gent.," cannot therefore have borrowed the latter item of information from Rawdon Brown's 'Calendars.' To this, I frankly confess, I have nothing to say just now, except that the possibility of accounting for the statement does not seem to be altogether beyond the reach of ultimate investigations.

As to the date of 24 June for the landfall, it is, in itself, highly improbable, considering that it does not leave time enough for what may be fairly assumed to have been done by Cabot before returning home, Mr. PROWSE and Mr. WEARE'S objections to the contrary notwithstanding. They are unwilling to admit that after having been tossed on the waves during fifty-three days the small crew required a little rest, the diminutive craft some repairs, and the larder additional provisions (which could be obtained only by hunting and salting game on shore). My contradictors say that "fifty-three days out from Bristol to Newfoundland, and forty-two days home, would not be a record-breaking passage even for those days." Certainly not; but this curious reasoning implies that Cabot must have set sail homeward on the very day when he first sighted the American continent, which is hard to believe. Meanwhile, what becomes of the 300 leagues to and fro, amounting to 600, which Cabot coasted in the new land: "Andato per la costa lige 300," as he related to Pasqualigo, and as corroborated by Soncino, who saw the description of the newly-found country marked in a chart and on a solid globe which Cabot had made: "in una carta, et anche in una sphaera solida che lui ha fatto et

demostra dove è capito"? MR. PROWSE and MR. WEARE should not have omitted to explain the nautical phenomenon which their argument involves.

At all events, my objections have been tacitly endorsed by the Royal Society of Canada, which, in the brass tablet it caused to be placed in the Legislative Hall at Halifax, does not say that the discovery was accomplished "June 24, on St. John the Baptist's Day," and that "Cape Breton Island," or even "Bonavista Bay," was the land-fall. The inscription only, and wisely, states that the flags of England and Venice were first planted in the New World by John Cabot, "in the June of 1497, on the north-eastern seaboard of North America." So much for MR. PROWSE and MR. WEARE'S asseverations in that respect.

If we now examine the extrinsic character of the Fust chronicle, we notice certain particulars also worthy of attention. Neither the original MS. nor a complete copy of it can be found anywhere. Critics consequently are deprived of the most precious means of information; for, if spurious, the MS. could not resist the close scrutiny of palæographers, while its substance would certainly afford materials to exercise the acumen of historians. As the matter stands, they have only to work upon a few extracts made by a bookseller's assistant after 1845.

Nor can the existence of the original MS. be traced further back than Sir Francis Fust, who died in 1769. In the list of members of his family he is the only one who is mentioned as having been a book collector, and the MS. contained his own personal book-plate. Under the circumstances, it rests with MR. WEARE to show that the MS. existed

between 1565 and the time when Sir Francis acquired it. MR. WEARE replies with the statement that "the evidence of living persons could, if necessary, be obtained to prove that, apparently, the chronicle was in a contemporary, *i. e.*, sixteenth century, style of writing." But are these persons versed in palæography? Do they not know that the time when Sir Francis First lived was the golden age in Bristol of forged documents in old penmanship?

Barrett's 'History of Bristol' is filled with spurious historical accounts of that description. Nay, we know when, where, and by whom they were fabricated. In the language of Mr. Charles Kent, "whatever information Barrett wanted for his immediate purpose was placed by Chatterton, within a few hours' time, at his command." How are we to distinguish the grain from the chaff, and why should not the MS. quoted by Barrett for his brief account of Cabot's voyage be as fictitious as the rest? There is scarcely any difference in kind and spirit between that entry and others in the pseudo-correspondence between the equally spurious monk Rowley and Canynghe. Take these, for instance:—

"1068. Three Brystowe Barks sayled to the isles Hyberne and Scotteland.

"1073. The Brystowe Menne did Trade to the Isles. Haymon with Normannes and Bry-towe Menne dyd despoyle the Londe of Wales. Twa welche Barkes menewhyle came to Bristowe, and despoyled part of the Brydge, botte weere forslegen and dryven awaie.

"1231. Trade to Hyberne was begonno to bee made bie the Brystowe Menne," &c.

Nor were those forgeries limited to Barrett's desiderata. I must be permitted to quote again Mr. George Price, the learned City Librarian of

Bristol, who, when referring to certain documents of which the local historians have made ample use, says :—

“I have for a long time regarded these writings as exceedingly mischievous, so far at least as they refer to Bristol, and deserving to be classed with the forgeries of Chatterton, who in fact, I have no doubt, was the author of many of them.”

If such suspicion may attach to Barrett's Cabottian entry, the entry in the Fust chronicle must share it, for we have only to compare both to see at a glance that they are near akin, besides being the only sources of information for the statement.

In reply, MR. WEARE says that “Mr. Kerslake, bookseller, of Bristol, who was a very intelligent and painstaking antiquary, during the time, or a portion of the time, the chronicle remained in his possession, had also in his possession genuine and unquestioned specimens of Chatterton's handwriting.” I fail to perceive the cogency of the argument. If the Fust chronicle was “in the style of writing of the sixteenth century,” of what use could be specimens of Chatterton's handwriting? I may add that the young and accomplished forger penned a goodly number of his fabrications in a manner to lead people to believe that the penmanship was contemporary with the events related, as the Chatterton MSS. preserved in the British Museum amply show.

I timidly ventured to suggest that all those anachronisms and indications were calculated to create in the mind of critical historians an impression of doubt regarding the authenticity of the Fust and Barrett excerpts. The word “impression” has provoked the mirth of MR. WEARE, who does not seem to know that the first result of every

inquiry is, generally, an "impression." Sometimes, however, with a certain class of authors, that primary impression is the main object and made to precede, so to speak, the inquiry.

The adepts in this peculiar method of writing history invariably preface their compilations with touching references to the tremendous labours which they have accomplished. At the same time, deep regret is expressed for being unable, by lack of space or from some other reason, to initiate the reader into the arcana of their efforts and wonderful discoveries. This confession naturally creates an "impression" of sympathy, and is the first step.

They then set forth a very long list of distinguished persons who, at home and abroad, have given them advice and assistance, as no single man could possibly go through such arduous and difficult researches unassisted. The result is an "impression" that the writer has a good heart, overflowing with gratitude, and is incapable of appropriating the labours of others.

This is followed by a most imposing array of quotations and documents. The display produces the "impression" that the work is one of uncommon erudition and industry.

A goodly number of these documentary proofs are published in Latin, Spanish, Italian, &c., with direct references to the archives which contain them, here and elsewhere, and even with the rubrics, pages, files, and registers ostentatiously, if not always faithfully, cited. But as in twenty-five cases out of forty-two the real searchers or first editors, who have been thus plagiarized, are not mentioned, these twenty-five documents (which figure among the most important in the collection) all bear the appearance of original discoveries. They

also create the "impression" that the gifted historian has laboriously worked his way through the inner recesses of the Public Record Office and of the State archives at Milan, Florence, Venice, Simancas, and the Vatican, where he certainly never set his foot.

But when a reader familiar with the subject takes the trouble to look into these useless books, he has an "impression" which is not always to the credit of their authors. For instance, in one lately published, out of forty-two documents, forty-one have been repeatedly printed, and all together in two or three modern publications which can be consulted in every important library. So that those Herculean labours would require, all told, about half a day's work, comfortably seated in an armchair in the British Museum!

Happily, there is a class of historians whose "impressions" may be said to be of a very different character. They are the outcome of long studies of the original sources, regardless of time-honoured legends and fabrications. And so far as the authentic history of the Cabots is concerned, these "impressions" have not proved thus far entirely fruitless.

Let me be permitted to ask, Where is the historian worthy of the name who now believes that the American continent was discovered in 1494, and not in 1497; that it was Sebastian Cabot who accomplished it, and not his father; nay, who would assert that he was even on board the ship; that the landfall was certainly Cape Breton Island, particularly since the recent publication of the "Mathematical Demonstration of the Fallacy"; that Sebastian was born in Bristol, and not in Venice; that he was a great navigator, cartographer,



and scientist ; that he discovered the variation and declination of the compass, and, by divine revelation, as he pretended, or otherwise, methods for finding the longitude at sea ; that there is the least proof of his alleged successful exertions on behalf of the Merchant Adventurers in their struggle with the Steelyard ; that he had a commendable share in the opening of trade with Russia, or that the merit of the act does not belong exclusively to Richard Chancellor ; or, in fine, who would now say that Sebastian is "the author of the maritime strength of England, who opened the way to those improvements which have rendered the English so great, so eminent, so flourishing a people" ? So far from this encomium being true, it is now proved, beyond all cavils and sophistry, that Sebastian Cabot was an unmitigated charlatan, a liar, and a traitor !

All these appreciations were at first mere "impressions," and although hooted at almost when set forth fifteen years ago, they have evolved to matters of strong belief with our most competent adepts in maritime history. The probability is that the other points mooted, but existing as yet only as "impressions," will also be solved to the satisfaction of every conscientious historian.

HENRY HARRISSE.

Paris.

